

## OUTDOORS

DEC / *By Will Elliott*

# Game warden shares life stories

Dick Lang asked “where did those years go?” last week after receiving the first copies of his book “Behind the Badge: My Life as a Game Warden.”

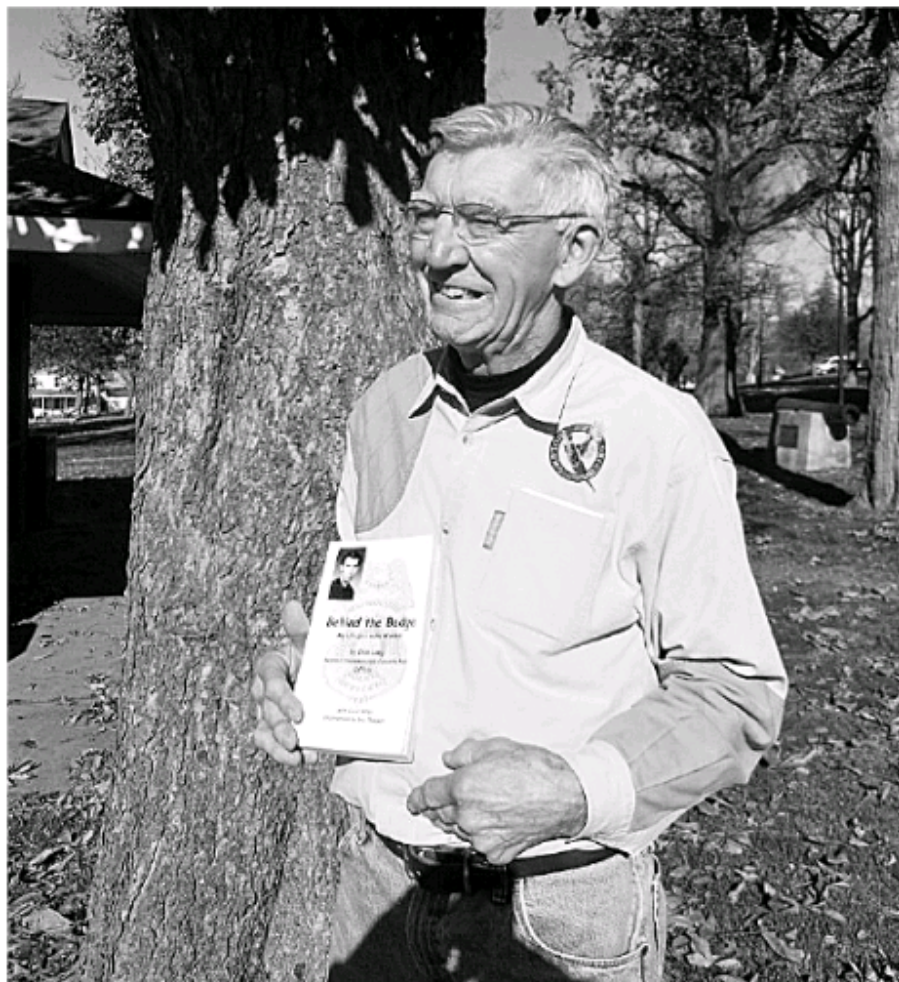
Lang’s reference was both to his 34 years working as a Department of Environmental Conservation officer and the nine years that have passed since his retirement in 2003.

Lang, born and raised in Western New York, devoted his entire career as a conservation officer in the area, patrolling local waters, woods and fields.

When he was first appointed as an officer, new appointees simply drove to Albany to pick up their gear and reported to an assigned regional office for on-the-job training.

That training included area field officers such as Bob Kauffman from Alden, Harry Keppner from Lancaster, Bob Sterling from Lakeview, Kimpton Vosburg from Niagara County and others who had learned their game warden ropes first hand out in the field.

Lang’s high regard for these officers began the first time he saw them presenting hunter



Tonawanda, Oak Orchard Wildlife Management Area and much of Lake Ontario and Lake Erie during his career.

“I knew every rock below Burt Dam,” Lang said of the fishing access on Eighteen Mile Creek between Newfane and Olcott Harbor. That area was the scene of many encounters with violators, especially during and just after snagging was prohibited as a means of fish catching.

Lang’s book has a special appeal for anyone who has spent any time fishing, hunting or trapping in the area. His chapters are designed to be brief highlights of key aspects in each encounter and observation along his patrol way. From references to “Buffalo hunters” to smelt dippers, trout snaggers and one highly addicted game violator with more than 50 offenses, each of Lang’s narratives gives readers an accurate and first-hand view of what the outdoors was like during his years on duty.

Curiously, more than half of the activities Lang describes are pursuits that anglers, hunters, trappers and shooters find available

safety classes at the Erie County Fairgrounds in Hamburg. His admiration for their professional appearance, their demeanor with young sportsmen and his love for the outdoors, begun on outings with his dad, led to a career of chasing the bad outdoors guys while exhibiting a good-guy image of conservation officers with young and newly-introduced outdoors enthusiasts.

His book reflects both his love and respect for the resource and for the good people he worked with and served, not to mention his extensive efforts to apprehend and bring to justice those bad guys who break fish and game laws and harm that

**Retired Environmental Conservation Officer Dick Lang has written a book on the good and the bad guys and great times he encountered and enjoyed during his years of service in Western New York.**

---

resource.

Along the way, Lang's various cases resulted in encounters that have readers amused and amazed at the extent to which poachers and other violators behave in the wilds.

A major part of his duties included work at and from home. Long before cell phones and wildlife rehabilitators, a game warden's home became the reception/call center for complaints. Lang offers thanks to his wife Gretchen and all the wives of ECOs who, decades ago, served as receptionists and

monitors of complaints.

Along with answering the phone, many wives of game wardens had to tend to wildlife such as infant raccoons, fawn deer, and other creatures that people would find in the wild and drop off at the house.

Duty tours took him everywhere. "By the time I was finished I could find a place to hide anywhere in those 'swamps,'" Lang said of the state's 6,000 acres in the Tonawanda Wildlife Management Area.

Lang's beat included

today and, hopefully, others around our area will find in the future.

My only criticism offered to Lang after reading these chapters was that the stories ended too quickly. Somewhere near page 360 I realized that these interesting, too-familiar depictions of places and people were about to end.

This book will make a great holiday gift, or, better still, a personal present; area outdoors readers will be enthralled by its content.

To order a signed copy (\$20 plus shipping), call 433-7748; email: [glang3@rochester.rr.com](mailto:glang3@rochester.rr.com); or look for it on Amazon.com or on Kindle.

---

*email: [odrswill@gmail.com](mailto:odrswill@gmail.com)*